

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR TRIBUNE LIBRARY FILES

1-13-56  
(Tribune people themselves are newsworthy. In order to bring Library files up to date and to have a background of reliable and accurate information this form is being circulated. Fullest details will be appreciated. Use both sides of form if needed.)

NAME: Nancy Barr Mavity (Rogers) ADDRESS: 112 Lexford Road, Piedmont

FAMILY (Parents' names, brothers, sisters, husband, wife, children):

Parents: Dr. G. Walter Barr, Annabelle Applegate Barr

Husband: Edward A. Rogers

Children: Nancy Mavity Nye (Mrs. George Nye) Berkeley

John Barr Mavity Berkeley

BIRTHPLACE & DATE: Lawrenceville, Ill. Oct 22, 1890

TRIBUNE: (Present position, others held here, when came to paper, awards and honors won, etc.)

Literary Editor since 1943; has been columnist, feature writer, news writer.

Came to Tribune 1925

NEWSPAPER SERVICE ELSEWHERE:

S. F. Chronicle 1920-24 Literary Editor

PUBLISHED WORKS: (Books, Magazine articles)

Contributor to Harper's Mag., Cosmopolitan, Readers Digest, Saturday Review, Sunset, Modern Living and other mags.

For list of books, see Who's Who in America.

AFFILIATIONS: (Church, lodge, union, etc.)

OTEEA, President 1947, 1954

PUBLIC SERVICE: (Civil Defense, Chamber of Commerce, Red Cross, etc.)

MILITARY SERVICE:

EDUCATION: A.B. Western College, Oxford Ohio. 1911

Graduate study Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass. 1911-12

M.A. Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. 1913

Ph.D. 2" " " 1914

OTHER DATA OF INTEREST:



# Robert Frost Finds His Life Is Long Vacation

By NANCY BARR MAVITY

The world today, generally described as confused, imperiled and belligerent, is not too harsh a climate for poetry to thrive in—in fact, neither world nor poets are any worse off than they have always been.

This dissenting opinion is the voice of Robert Frost, who, nearing his 79th birthday, has known much of the world and, as poet, has set a record as the only four-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize.

"I hear all the time about the critical state the world is in, and I don't believe it. There's always a lot of turmoil going on, one way or another. And poets are always complaining that they don't get enough notice. Well, I got neglected plenty, too, and when that happened, I just turned to something else, like farming," says the poet who, by and large, has made more of a success at poetry than at farming.

## BERKELEY VISITOR

Frost, who denies that he is a literary man "because I never set out to make a living at it," is spending a week in Berkeley as the guest of Professor and Mrs. George R. Stewart. Although he is a quintessentially New England poet of world wide fame, his visit is a return to his native California.

Heretically, he regards California as a nice place to visit old friends in; but New England—and not all of New England either, just the "North of Boston" part including Vermont and a patch of Maine—is his chosen country.

His conversation has the resinous tang of chewing on a green pine-needle. If he is a heretic, he has never been a crusader. If his life has crackled with paradoxes, they were never poses. If he is that nearly extinct creature, the unreconstructible individualist, he has never been a rebel.

The paradoxes begin with his passionate love for the New England which his father as passionately repudiated in favor of San Francisco. He has lost count of the number of university degrees conferred upon him (they are close to two dozen) but he "never got a degree honestly, by working for it."

He has held professorships at Amherst, the University of Michigan, and Harvard, but has never climbed the step by step rungs of the academic ladder:

"They picked me out of the gutter and made a full professor of me."

In 1950 Robert Frost's "Complete Poems" was awarded the gold medal by a poll of leading

critics as the book of poetry published over a period of five years "most likely to attain the stature of a classic."

"I didn't realize that. I hope it says it on the medal," he remarked. "I just scatter poems, sprinkle them over the years. I have these little spells of writing, with never a book in mind. I never had a desk in my life. I write sitting around here and there, and I'm rather furtive about it—not like the ladies who put on their lipstick in public."

The man who once, he tells us, lived eight years on a farm and left it only twice in that period, now has a busy schedule of lectures, writers' conferences, summer sessions, and guest professorships.

Two of the winter months are spent in Florida, where he has a citrus orchard set about with palmettos: "They are pretty, the palmettos, but people are always bulldozing them up to plant flowers." Gentle the voice, but one can see he takes a dim view of bulldozers.

## HAPPY ANY PLACE

"Then I go back to Vermont. I have a rough farm, two or three acres, up there—not like California where on a farm you can't find a stone to throw at a crow. On my farm, I can walk in any direction from rock to rock without setting foot on the ground. But I go around quite a lot, and I'm happy most any place in the United States."

Happiest, though, you think, on those rocky Vermont acres, where he lives alone, does his own cooking and housekeeping, "except when I go down the hill for meals with friends." Of the present hegira of American literati to Italy, rivalling the wholesale expatriation to Paris in the '20s, Frost speaks with a sort of determined toleration.

"I never felt the call to be an expatriate," he commented, "but I hold it to be the inalienable right of anybody to go to hell in his own way. As for me, I'm not ambitious, I never cared about seeing my name in print or being asked to become a member of anything, and I never thought much of work. I'm not industrious. I have nothing to 'retire' from. My life has been one long vacation."

If the "vacation" at present reads like a busy and active schedule and in the past has brought an accumulation of accomplishments and honors, these are an accidental by-product to little spells of writing, strewing poems.

# Nancy Barr Mavity, Book Editor, Dies

Nancy Barr Mavity Rogers, distinguished newspaperwoman, author and critic and member of the Oakland Tribune staff for 34 years, died of a heart attack early today.

Death came at her home, 112 Lexford Road, Piedmont. She was 68 years old.

She was at her desk, as usual, in The Tribune city room yesterday. She died without warning when apparently in good health.

Her passing will end a famous, respected and constant byline in The Tribune over the years:

"By Nancy Barr Mavity."

During her long career she covered many of the outstanding stories, particularly crime, of her era, authored 12 books, wrote fact and fiction for national magazines. Since 1943 she has been literary editor of The Tribune.

In private life she was Mrs. Edward (Doc) Rogers, wife of The Tribune's veteran news photographer. Together they had been an outstanding writing-photography team.

A native of Lawrenceville,

Continued Page 4, Col. 2

# Editor, Dies

Continued from Page 1

Ill., she was the daughter of Dr. G. Walter Barr who gave her early indoctrination in newspaper work because he himself turned to it instead of his profession of medicine. She was educated in Western College, Oxford, Ohio, and took her Ph.D. in philosophy at Cornell University after graduate study at Wellesley College.

She taught in Connecticut College before going to New York to join a publishing house. In 1915 she married Arthur Benton Mavity and the couple came to the Bay Area in 1919 when he was assigned to the San Francisco office of Henry Holt Co., publishers. He died in 1931.

She went to the Orient for Sunset magazine in 1923 and returned to spend two years working on the San Francisco Chronicle. In 1925 she came to The Tribune where she remained since as one of the outstanding women reporters of her day.

She spent those years tending a brilliant mind and facile writing talent to every type of story covering criminals to prime ministers, trials to great world conferences, prisoners to literary evaluation.

She covered the sensational career of Evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson and from it wrote a book, "Sister Aimee." In a life that had a big story every day there were such notable milestones as the Lamson case, the Hickman case and the Egan case.

Her books included "Responsible Citizen," written in collaboration with Arthur Benton Mavity, her first husband, and also "A Dinner of Herbs" (verse). "Hazard," "The Tule Marsh Murder," "The Body on the Floor," "The Other Bullet," "The Case of the Missing Sandals," "The Modern Newspaper" (a textbook), "The Man Who Didn't Mind Hanging," "State Versus Elna Jepson," "Child Crime in California."

She was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, American Association of University Women, Alameda County Mental Hygiene Society and the College Women's Club of Berkeley. She was a Unitarian.

Besides her husband she is survived by two children, Mrs. Nancy Mavity Nye, wife of George Nye, Alameda County public defender, and John Barr Mavity of Berkeley. There are four grandchildren.



# Nancy Barr Mavity

THE APR 21 1959

The long association with The Tribune of Nancy Barr Mavity has been ended by her sudden death yesterday.

Mrs. Mavity began her career as journalist and literary critic with this newspaper when she joined The Tribune Staff in 1925 and quickly distinguished herself as one of the outstanding women reporters in the field of journalism. Her specialty was the coverage of crime stories and her work on such cases as the Lamson, Hickman and Egan trials is considered to be the finest in this field.

From her reporting of leading criminal cases came her literary works which included a dozen volumes of mystery stories. But her stories were not limited to crime stories and one of her most distinguished works was that on the career of the evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson.

In 1941 Mrs. Mavity became book editor of this newspaper and since that time the book page has borne the imprint of her writing talent, her literary background, her wide range of knowledge and her literary associations.

Mrs. Mavity was a writer of great fluency. Her wit was mordant, her criticism caustic when the occasion justified, gentle and kindly when she lent encouragement to young and inexperienced writers. She was not tolerant of "the fools and the prophets" but her experience of life and human relations enabled her to accept the seamy and sordid side of life objectively just as, subjectively, she had a true appreciation of the higher values of great literature and poetry and indeed all the arts.

Mrs. Mavity will be greatly missed by her many friends and her thousands of readers.

# She Also Cooks . . .



TR 5C JUN 14 1958

Looking across the city room at someone whose typewriter is going in rhythm with everybody else's, and who cocks an ear for the fire bell and the sheriff's radio calls like everybody else, it's hard to remember that she's a celebrity, appropriately noted in Who's Who.

College instructor, novelist, magazine and newspaper feature writer, wife, mother and grandmother—Nancy Barr Mavity has been all of these with the same efficiency and determination. But her greatest love (career-wise), is the city room.

"I went into newspaper work to enlarge my experience of people as an aid to fiction writing," she recalls, "then I stayed in it for its own sake, and I still enjoy it as much as ever after umpteen years."

In private life Mrs. Edward (Doc) Rogers (her husband is the well known news photographer), is a visible proof of her argument that home and a career not only can, but should, be combined for a woman.

combined for a woman.

"I firmly believe women as well as men should use any special aptitudes they may have for the greater benefit both of themselves and the world," she says. "The family is the joint concern of the father and the mother. Sometimes things are divided so that the woman takes care of the household chores completely, but that division of labor isn't divinely appointed."



NANCY MAVITY

Possessor of bachelor's, master's and doctor's degrees in English and psychology, Nancy forsook her first fields, a college faculty and book publisher's editorial rooms, for this one where she hoped to find "experience of people." She did, and the people were definitely not run of the mill. Now, as book page editor of The Oakland

Tribune, she is concerned with fictional characters, but for years she specialized in crime stories, and the people were real, and unquestionably characters.

She covered the Lamson case, the Hickman case, the Egan case—and had such experiences as this: "Well, they were bringing Hickman (he'd kidnapped and killed a little girl), down from Oregon to Los Angeles, and the train stopped here briefly. We could have pictures but no interviews. I grabbed the tripod and climbed on with the cameraman, and leaned over his shoulder (I had to stand on one of those rickety little tables they have on trains, I'm so short), and got in a few questions before the cops threw me off. And when my story came out the next day the other papers shrieked that I'd faked it because I was a fiction writer, but I hadn't."

Her first husband was the late Arthur Benton Mavity, and their two children are chips off the individualistic block—son John a classical guitarist, daughter "little Nancy" an attorney, wife of Alameda County Public Defender George Nye and mother of four.

While having her family and her newspaper career, (and several dynasties of cats) Nancy wrote over a dozen books, including verse, a biography titled "Sister Aimee" and such murder stories as "The Tule Marsh Murder," "The Body on the Floor," "The Man Who Didn't Mind Hanging."

And she managed to whip up a meal or two at home. She calls herself a "notional" cook (and has sometimes put on the table a dish she could never duplicate). But something she has managed to pin down is called Veal in Sour Cream, and goes like this:

Take 2 pounds veal, cut in cubes, brown in oil, put in casserole. In top of double boiler stir 2 tablespoons flour, 3 tablespoons water,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt, dash paprika. Add 1 tablespoon onion juice, 1 can mushrooms, 1 cup sour cream slowly. Put with veal in casserole, bake  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 hour at 300 degrees, serve with rice.

It couldn't taste any better with a page one byline.

—KAY WAHL.



# Oakland Officials to Join in Salute to Joaquin Miller

TR 5C SEP 21 1958

By NANCY BARR MAVITY

Attractions of music, dance, drama and pageantry—plus the appeal of an increasingly popular tradition—will be combined in the annual celebration of Joaquin Miller Day at the Woodminster Amphitheater in Joaquin Miller Park on Sunday, September 28, at 8 p.m. The performance, sponsored by the Oakland Park Department, is open to the public without charge.

Juanita Miller, daughter of California's famous personality and "poet of the Sierra," and herself a poet, dancer, singer and composer, is producer and director of the program of varied entertainment, which will be presented with

Joseph R. Knowland as honorary chairman and Mayor Clifford Rishell as master of ceremonies for the occasion.

The festivities will open with music by an ensemble orchestra conducted by Jack McDermott, welcoming remarks by Mayor Rishell, blessing by Father Maurice, and an East Indian prayer with ceremonial dancers led by Althea Youngman.

Main attraction is the presentation of a musical play, depicting three eventful scenes from the poet's life—in a California mining camp, at the court of Queen Victoria, and in his later years on "The Hights" in Oakland, now con-

secrated to his memory as Joaquin Miller Park.

Incidental music and dances include folk dances by the Helen Kramm trio, directed by Dorothy Schiwal; a "color cycle" of songs composed by Juanita Miller, with dancers from the Raoul Pause ballet school; Spanish dances by La Carmencita Hill; "Grandmother Follies," directed by Maud Sloan Fluno; and the skirling of bagpipes by authentically kilted and sporranded William R. Skinner, the "John Brown" of the Queen Victoria sequence.

With Alexander Hays as stage manager and Billie Schubert as general narrator, the performing cast features William Petersen as poet Joaquin Miller; Clare Beebe as his wife, Abbie; Alice de Rivera as his baby daughter, Juanita; Juanita Miller herself; Viola Ponsonby Rankin as Queen Victoria; Rudolphine Radil as the fairy queen of the child Juanita's dream.

Among those taking part in various roles from camp to court are Col. and Mrs. Walter Knox, Judge and Mrs. A. J. Woolsey, Sir John Morgan, Baron and Baroness Hergen-hahn, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph de

Rivera, Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Lyon, Countess Lillian Remillard Dandini and Count Alfred Hormola.

Before the performance, Juanita Miller will be hostess to 90 dinner guests, including

the entire cast, city and park officials and friends, at Don and Ann's on Mountain Boulevard. After dinner the party will be "piped" up the hill to the amphitheater to the strains of William Skinner's bagpipes.

# Grand Eccentric In Homecoming

By NANCY BARR MAVITY

Raymond Duncan, 83, in hand-woven fringed toga, barefoot sandals, a fillet binding his long, smooth white hair, blew into Juanita Miller's "Tiny Temple of the Muses" this weekend, embraced his hostess, and exclaimed: "Ah, the Sierras! The poet of the Sierras!"

This was his immediate tribute to Joaquin Miller, who, as a poet and personality, made his home on "The Hights" in Oakland internationally famous in a tradition now carried on by his daughter, Juanita.

Duncan and his famous dancer sister, the late Isadora Duncan, were born in Oakland, and he returns from his Paris base every now and then to prove that this old town can breed eccentrics in the grand manner.

Only he denies that he is an eccentric.

## OTHERS ECCENTRIC

"All the other people are eccentric," he said with a smile. "I'm running straight. Also I have been called the most kissed man in Paris."

Though pleasant, this hardly seems a lifetime occupation to keep the breadbox filled and taxes paid up to a hale and hearty 83 years.

He has done it, he says, by "doing nothing specially." That sounds like nice work if you can get it — and Raymond Duncan, flipping his toga fringe at the Organization Man, evidently got it. Prodded as to the ways and means of living to a pink-cheeked old age by doing nothing specially, and thriving on the proceeds, he expanded a bit:

## LECTURE IN EAST

"I don't do anything but manufacture toys and things that please me to do, and people grab them up. Simple. I like everybody. My house and workshop are like a boulevard — hundreds coming and going, nice affectionate people of all kinds. I have a theater, give concerts, lectures, art exhibits — all free, nothing to pay. I show them what old fashioned Western hospitality is like."

Now and then Duncan romps across a continent or two on a lecture tour. He is leaving Oakland tomorrow to fill a date in Philadelphia. What is he going to lecture about?

"I really don't know," he said with a serene smile and a coy shake of those silky white locks. "I haven't any idea at the moment — I can talk about anything."

Juanita Miller, whose father also had a reputation as a High Eccentric in his day, had gathered 50 or so guests to meet her old friend and hear him talk about anything. He did, with aplomb and equanimity. Somehow, in watching him, one was caught up into believing that this was no mere poseur, but one of the rare, true and authentic breed of eccentrics who live long and happily without ever keeping in step.

"Life," he observed, giving us full benefit of his porcelain-skinned impeccable profile, "is a curious thing. When you get old enough you begin to see through the keyhole. Before you can open the door, you go out."



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TR 56 MAY 3 - 1959  
Outstanding

Editor: The Northern California chapter of the Mystery Writers of America has asked me to express the deep regret of our entire group at the death of Nancy Barr Mavity.

She was not only an outstanding practitioner of our trade, among her many other activities. She was also one of our most helpful and valued friends, both in her official capacity as chief of your book section and as an individual whom most of us knew and were proud to know.

To her family and her associates we offer our heartfelt sympathy.

—POUL ANDERSON.  
Berkeley.

# Poet Joaquin Miller Papers Found in Vacant House Here

TR 5C APR 26 1959

By **NANCY BARR MAVITY**

Treasure hunters are a various lot. We usually think of them as adventurous young men digging for Captain Kidd's buried pirate loot, or diving for gold ingots lost in sunken Spanish galleons. They are not all like that.

Harold Holmes, 81, is a treasure hunter of a different stripe. He does not plot his course by map and compass but by his own encyclopedic memory for old family names, their connections and friends. He does not dig in the sands of tropical islands, but in attics, trunks and boxes.

Dean of West Coast antiquarian book dealers and founder of the Holmes Book Company of Oakland and San Francisco, Holmes's eye gleams when, in a mass of old books, mouldering records and family albums, he stumbles on an unexpected "find" in his specialty of Western Americana.

It is gleaming now.

## RARE DISCOVERY

In an old, long-vacant house at 1015 East Twelfth St., Oakland, and in an estate at Los Gatos which had passed to a distant relative of the original owners, he uncovered rare and hitherto unknown photographs and letters pertaining to Joaquin Miller, California's famous poet of the last century.

As with other "lost treasures," such discoveries are not made purely by accident. The house on East 12th St., one of the oldest still standing in Oakland, was at one time the home of Willie Walker.

Holmes remembered that Willie Walker had been a fel-

*Editor's Note — Nancy Barr Mavity finished this story for The Tribune shortly before she died of a heart attack. Her death ended a 34-year association as a top reporter for this newspaper.*

low library worker with Ina Coolbrith and, through her, a member of the literary circle of the time. The family has long since dispersed, but boxes and cartons, dusty and disregarded, had been left behind. Holmes bought the lot—and in a twinkling found himself transported to scenes of three-quarters of a century ago.

## FAMILIAR SCENE

Among the faded photographs was one showing Joaquin Miller near the log cabin he built for himself, from timbers he carried on his shoulders from the canyon, on the treeless slope of what is now wooded and landscaped Joaquin Miller Park. Two others give views of "The Abbey," which the poet had built to his own design on what he called "The Heights."

When Holmes showed the photographs to Juanita Miller, daughter of the "Poet of the Sierra," she estimated the date to be in the 1880's, and recognized a horse in the picture as the pony, "Black Rose," she used to ride in her father's life time.

The second part of the treasure was unearthed from the estate of H. G. Osborn, now in the hands of a distant relative who did not even remember—though Holmes did—that Osborn belonged to the coterie

of literary who gathered with Joaquin Miller at "The Heights."

From the present owner, Holmes obtained a sheaf of informal photographs showing the bearded poet, with pick and hoe, clearing the ground and setting stones in the wall for what is now one of California's most famous literary landmarks.

The Osborn collection also brought to light a letter, from one poet to another, written by James Whitcomb Riley to Joaquin Miller in January, 1892, in which he wrote in part:

"Your brief hail lifts a man way up. It is the wind's voice and the sea's . . . But see what penalty you pay for such an utterance: Behold! I send you two more books of mine, together with my photograph. An thou truly lovest me, send me a like portrait of yourself."

## POETIC LETTER

"As to ever coming your way again, be utterly assured I shall remember . . . Let me certainly hear from you. Faithfully and affectionately always."

They really did write letters in those days!

Holmes offered to present his finds to the poet's daughter, but suggested that they might be safer if placed in the Oakland Public Library. In this, Juanita Miller heartily concurred, and Mrs. Frances Hurd Buxton, senior librarian of the California Room, accepted the gift in behalf of the library.

There the treasure, no longer hidden and forgotten, will be available for all to see.



# Nancy's Now 'Legend of Newsdom'

RE APR 23 1959

By ELINOR HAYES

Intrepid, brilliant, whimsical and with a curiosity about and liking for life at all levels, Nancy Barr Mavity lived a ~~newspaper life that~~ was pure Front Page.

In the years to come stories about her will be legendary.

Nancy Barr Mavity, who in private life was Mrs. Edward A. Rogers, wife of a veteran cameraman, died today of a heart attack at her home, 112 Lexford Road, Piedmont. There was no advance warning.

In her day she had won scratches, bruises, scars and accolades as a reporter who let no man beat her on a big story.

A Phi Beta Kappa with a doctorate in philosophy, she met on their own levels the leaders and great minds she interviewed and her interpretation of scientific and behavior stories were regarded as expert.

She once said:

"I went into newspaper work to enlarge my experience of people as an aid to fiction writing, then I stayed in it for its own sake."

She could write as learnedly about social reforms as about criminals and her language interpreted her knowledge colorfully as when she called Aimee Semple McPherson "a flamingo in a chicken coop."

## HICKMAN SCOOP

William Edward Hickman was being brought back from Oregon to Los Angeles to face trial for child murder when the train stopped at the Oakland 16th St. Station.

No reporters were allowed aboard the train here . . . but Nancy got on. Her subsequent story brought screams from editors of other papers that it was a fake.

But the Associated Press said "no story with a Mavity by-line could be a fake."

She was the only woman who ever spent a night in Folsom prison. It was during the hearing on the pardon application of Warren K. Billings, convicted of the 1916 Preparedness Day bombing in San Francisco. The rule was that no woman would be allowed inside the prison walls.

In "Adventures of a News

In "Adventures of a News Hunter" she later wrote:

"I stormed into the office on a high wind of high moral indignation. I was not asking the favor of attending as a woman but the right of attending as a reporter." She won her point.

At the end of the hearing she wrote all night and when her editor compared her story with the official transcript he found it conformed completely.

"I do not know why, since it involved no originality or ingenuity on my part, but I am prouder of this than any other piece of work I have ever done," she later wrote.

In those days it was nothing for a reporter to chase a story all night and turn out a full newspaper page of copy.





Tribune photo

## NANCY BARR MAVITY

### Distinguished Career Ends

year concern with perhaps the most famous and certainly the most controversial case in California history."

That was the case of David Lamson, convicted and retried again twice before his eventual release in the death of his wife, Allene.

"This controversy, I hope, will be settled once and for all," she later wrote. "It is my firm conviction based on the closest possible examination of all the facts that David Lamson is an innocent man."

When she turned to literary criticism she edited and wrote reviews of insight and scholarly evaluation.

She had one phobia . . . she hated a woman writer to be called an authoress.

They won't call Nancy an authoress. She always will be Mrs. Page One.

# Sister Aimee

APR 11 1993

## love affair

## the East

MAINT, NKNZY B

**O**NE CLASSIC American figure — the independent preacher — never seems to go away.

This Easter, we find the Rev. Jesse Jackson fighting racism in baseball while Branch Davidian cultist David Koresh holds out against federal agents in Waco, Tex.

Meanwhile, publishers Harcourt Brace Jovanovich have revived the legend of one of history's best-known and most enigmatic American Christians.

Harcourt's recent biography by Daniel Mark Epstein, "Sister Aimee: The Life of Aimee Semple McPherson" tells the compelling story of a glamorous Pentecostal preacher's rise to the status of the "best known woman in the world." (This book is reviewed on Page C-9 in today's newspaper.)

Her mission began with a beat-up Ford that she drove around the country, stopping to preach from the rear trundle seat. During her heyday in the 1920s, her cavernous church in Los Angeles drew crowds of 6,000 that often included many of Hollywood's hottest stars, including Charlie Chaplin, to see her elaborate religious theater productions.

McPherson owed much of her fame to the East Bay.

"There is no city in the world," McPherson once said, "where I have more and warmer friends than in Oakland," many of whom she met during an extended revival in a tent on San Pablo Avenue in 1921. Then, in 1922, she received a vision here — of an ox, a lion, an eagle and man — that inspired her revolutionary "four-square-gospel" theology. She later established a regional headquarters in Oakland and died here in 1944.



McPherson first gained nationwide media attention after disappearing from a southern California beach in 1926, only to turn up a few weeks later with a tale of her brutal kidnapping. In fact, police charged, McPherson was actually hiding out in bed in Carmel with a member of her Angelus Temple congregation. The hoax was never proved and McPherson's followers accused law enforcement of attempting to discredit her because of her beliefs.

**T**HE following year, McPherson was accused of assaulting her mother, Minnie Kennedy, at the Los Angeles temple, a tiff that thrust the evangelist into the media spotlight once again.

Weeks later, in an exclusive interview with Oakland Tribune reporter Nancy Barr Mavity during a revival meeting at Lake Tahoe, McPherson told a story of abuse and embezzlement by her mother. Mavity's story helped ignite national debate over both women's rights and proper child-rearing techniques.

"All that I ask of my own

APR



STEVEN  
LAVOIE

mother," McPherson told Mavity, "is to be let alone to carry on the work to which my life is devoted, to help all who come to me for help."

The scandals continued while revolt brewed among McPherson's growing flock after one of the evangelist's Oakland "friends," attorney Cromwell Ormsby, took over the business affairs of her ministry.

ORMSBY'S heavy-handed manner and questionable dealings aroused followers to force McPherson to fire him after she returned from one of many of her grueling preaching tours. Ormsby would later go to prison for his role in a gambling and kick-back scandal that crippled Oakland municipal government in 1930 and also earned then county sheriff, Burton Becker, a term in San Quentin.

Through it all, McPherson steadfastly pursued her mission to lead Fundamentalist Christianity into social action. The Tribune's Mavity published a biography of McPherson, "Sister Aimee," in 1931 that launched Mavity's career as a best-selling author and helped McPherson overcome her scandalous reputation.



tion.

McPherson's final trip brought her back to the East Bay in 1944 to dedicate a new church. Following the ribbon-cutting at the new Four Square Gospel Church, McPherson led a parade to a mass prayer at the Oakland Auditorium — now known as Kaiser Auditorium.

She returned to her room at the Leamington Hotel in downtown Oakland and was found dead just before noon the next day, September 27, 1944, by her son Rolfe. Minutes later, the bell that was due to ring at noon from the belfry of McPherson's main church in Los Angeles mysteriously fell silent.

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*Time Capsule appears in the Oakland Tribune every Sunday. Steven LaVoie writes about the people and places of the East Bay's past. If you have suggestions or comments, call 510-208-6420.*